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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON UNITED CIVIC FRONT ACTIVIST'S
HOSPITALIZATION

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Daniel A. Russell. Reason: 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) A Consulate St. Petersburg officer in Murmansk has confirmed the substance of media accounts that United Civic Front activist Larissa Arap has been involuntarily committed to a psychiatric hospital in the Murmansk region. Arap was apparently hospitalized by local psychiatric authorities unhappy with the bad publicity about practices in their institutions generated by an earlier media account for which she was a source. At the request of Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, the head of the Independent Psychiatric Association has assembled a panel of experts that was scheduled to travel to Murmansk August 2 in order to investigate the case. End summary.

¶2. (U) During August 1 meetings in Murmansk, a Consulate St. Petersburg officer confirmed media accounts that United Civic Front (UCF) activist Larissa Arap was involuntarily committed to a psychiatric hospital in Murmansk on July 5, then transferred on July 26 to a psychiatric hospital in the town of Apetity, about 300 kilometers from Murmansk, following a July 18 district court ruling.

¶3. (U) UCF representatives said that Arap had been institutionalized July 5 while obtaining medical documents necessary to renew her drivers license. UCF and members of Arap's family believe she was committed because she had been quoted in a June 8 article on abuse in psychiatric hospitals entitled "Madhouse" and published by the opposition group "Other Russia" on the occasion of its June 12 "March of Dissent" in Murmansk. UCF told the Consulate that doctors in both the Murmansk and Apetity hospitals had referred to the article as if it were in some way related to Arap's hospitalization.

¶4. (U) Arap had earlier been committed to a psychiatric institution, in 2004, after she had sought treatment from a doctor at her local clinic, reportedly for stress she was experiencing as chairwoman of her neighborhood's housing cooperative. UCF claimed she was at that time institutionalized for about two months, again allegedly against her will.

¶5. (U) Arap's lawyer has reportedly appealed the district court's ruling to the Murmansk regional court. Her husband has filed a complaint with the district prosecutor's office.

¶6. (SBU) Arap's institutionalization has been the subject of dozens of articles in national and local newspapers, and has sparked an outcry by the Russian human rights community. In response to appeals by UCF and others, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin on July 30 asked the President of the Independent Psychiatric Association Yuriy Savenko to assemble

a panel of experts to investigate the Arap case. Panel representatives reportedly departed Moscow August 2 for Murmansk.

Comment

17. (C) All of the information we have so far on this case comes from the UCF. Dr. Savenko, who is well known to the Embassy, is an excellent choice by Lukin to try to establish the facts in this case. Based on our limited information, the mistreatment of Arap appears to be the work of local psychiatric authorities, unhappy with the bad publicity about practices in their institutions generated by the June 8 "Other Russia" article. That said, questions remain about Arap's hospitalization two years ago, which no one is claiming to have been politically motivated.
RUSSELL